

A Wembury History – Medieval to Modern

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Numerous documents referring to Wembury are in existence, but are scattered and consequently make the production of a history difficult. This contribution was commissioned, therefore, to identify key sources and draw them together into a single document offering a synthesised overview. For this reason what follows should not be considered a complete history; it is instead provided as a convenient resource which future investigations might use as a springboard for more comprehensive work.

While it is accepted that local people know their parish well, readers from outside the area will not have this advantage. Before proceeding to the historical review, therefore, the next section provides an introduction to the locality.

Wembury's Geology and Topography

The parish is surrounded on three sides by water. The Yealm estuary lies to the east, and to the south and west the parish overlooks both the English Channel and Plymouth Sound. Its proximity to the town of Plymouth, which was destined to become the largest settlement in the south west peninsula, and to the major defence installation of Devonport Dockyard, have given it a history somewhat different from that of a typical South Hams parish.

The south-facing cliffs are composed of Dartmouth Slate, dating from the Lower Devonian period. These extend inland for some one to two kilometres where they are succeeded by the slates with grit of the Meadfoot Group, which are themselves succeeded (north of Bovisand and north-east of Knighton village) by grits and slates of the Staddon Grits.¹ The north-eastern extremity of the parish, bordering Cofflete Creek, consists of Middle Devonian slate. Landforms that developed during the climatic extremes of the Ice Age are present in the south west of the parish. Here the low cliffs incorporate a raised beach, established in a period of higher sea level during a warm phase, which was overlain by a deposit of 'head' laid down during a subsequent cold phase. The soils throughout the parish are ascribed to the Denbigh 1 formation of well-drained fine loamy and silty soils that can support mixed farming in lowland areas.²

The Medieval Period

Wembury parish is unusual in that the first authentically dated appearance of the name is not until 1238, although it derives from the Old English. It is perhaps comprised of *Waegan*, deriving from a personal name, and *burh*, meaning an earthwork.³ Alternative suggestions are *wen-shaped burgh*⁴ or *Weonbyrig*.⁵ This last, the dative of *Weoburgh*, translates as

¹ Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) 1:50 000 Drift Sheet 349, Ivybridge, 1974.

² Soil Survey of England & Wales 1:250,000 map of Soils of South West England 1983.

³ Gover *et al.* 1931, 260.

⁴ Hanks, *et al* Oxford Names Companion, OUP 2002.

⁵ Mills, A D English Place Names, OUP 1991.

Holy Burgh, which would be apt for the settlement's hilltop church site. The position of the parish church, close to the sea, and in a particularly remote location paralleled only by that of St Peter's at Revelstoke, is characteristic of early 'Celtic Christian' churches in Devon and Cornwall.

Two now-lost names of *Alfelmestone* and *Brictricestone* derive from the Old English *Aelfhelm's tun* (settlement) and *Beorhtic's tun*.⁶ The locations of both sites within the parish are discussed below.

It is quite possible that many of the farms in the parish originated in the Saxon period, but confirmation is lacking. The agricultural situation indicated by the Domesday Survey of 1086 is unusually complicated as there may have been eight estates within the present-day parish. Although the name of Wembury does not appear, it is inferred to have been included in the entry for the royal manor of Plympton, which stated that 'canons of this manor hold two hides',⁷ and the grant is believed to date from a lost charter by King Edgar. The holding was re-affirmed in a charter of Henry I, which named the estates as *Weybiria* and *Colebroc* (Colebrook).⁸

In 1086 there were said to be two estates at Langdon, both owned by Iudhael of Totnes and sublet to Waldin, and both assessed at half a hide and valued at 10s.⁹ Both were said to have land for two ploughs (perhaps 200 acres of arable land) and two acres of meadow. The two ploughs were actually present in the case of the estate formerly held by the Saxon

Heca, but this was not specifically stated in the case of the estate formerly of Goda. It appears that the manors were bounded on the west partly by the Hey Brook and on the east by the stream that served Wembury Mill, although the northern boundary is uncertain. To the west of the Hey Brook lay Down Thomas, another of Iudhael's estates. This had been taxed at three furlongs (three-sixteenths of a hide) but was valued at 15s. Here only two ploughs were present although there was potential for a third.¹⁰

Another estate, also of half a hide, was *Alfelmestone*,¹¹ today represented by Traine Farm (although for many years it was regarded as being at Yealmpstone in Plympton St Mary parish). In 1086 it was held by Ruald Adobed (Ruald the dubbed knight) and sub-let to Reginald. While there was said to be land for four ploughs at *Alfelmestone* only one and a half were present, yet the value of the estate had increased from 10s to 15s over the 20 years since the Conquest. There were four acres of meadow and 20 of underwood, presumably on the more sloping ground. Unusually, a salt house was present, where salt was produced by evaporating salt-water. The most likely site for this would be the little creek off Cofflete Creek (that still forms the parish boundary), possibly called Hodilflode.¹² It has been argued that this salt house (or *salina*) could have been for salting fish. Support for this theory comes from the fact that an old name for Cofflete Creek was Balkham (Baulking) Creek,¹³ baulking being the process of heaping fish before salting.

⁶ Gover *et al.* 1931, 254, 258.

⁷ Thorn & Thorn 1985, 1,17.

⁸ Oliver 1845, 134.

⁹ Thorn & Thorn 1985, 17,95–6.

¹⁰ Thorn & Thorn 1985, 17,88.

¹¹ Thorn & Thorn 1985, 35,27.

¹² The name occurs associated with Staddiscombe in an extract from the 1481 Plympton Priory rental.

¹³ PWDRO 372/23/2/6 Indenture describing North Ditch Farm Wembury, sketch plan, 1800.

It has been plausibly suggested that another of Ludhael's smaller estates, *Brictricestone*, lies within the parish, based around Raneleigh,¹⁴ an earlier identification with Brixton Barton in Shaugh parish now being discredited. This holding was assessed at one virgate and contained land for three ploughs, of which only two were present.¹⁵

The post-1945 extension of the parish boundary over what had been Plymstock parish took in the site of the former Staddon Farm, perhaps the centre of the Domesday estate of *Stotdone*, another of Ludhael's smaller estates. Its assessment was one virgate (a quarter of a hide) with land for two ploughs, although how many were present was not stated; only one smallholder appears to have been involved.¹⁶ The post-1945 parish boundary was drawn to exclude the settlement of Staddiscombe, but presumably included part of its fields. *Stotescome* was yet another of Ludhael's smaller estates, being assessed at one virgate, with land for two ploughs, although only one was present.¹⁷

In 1283 an Inquisition Post Mortem was held into the landholding of Thomas Pipard. He held the manor of Langdon, where the demesne contained 6 ferlings of arable land, each ferling said to contain 32 acres.¹⁸ Also present were a mill and a rabbit warren.

A taxation list for 1332 provides the names of taxpayers in the parish prior to the Black Death.¹⁹ At Langdon eleven paid amounts ranging from the 8d minimum up to the 3s paid by William Pipard, the

highest in the parish. At Down Thomas nine paid amounts up to 15d, but the most valuable information comes from *Alfameston*, where the four taxpayers had locative names that have enabled its location to be identified. Elias atte Forde paid 2s, John atte Treawen (Traine) paid 18d, while Thomas de Nytheretreawen (Nether Traine?) and John de Spirewell both paid 10d. Three of these four settlements still survive today, but the positive identification of Nytheretreawen is yet to be ascertained. *Brighricheston* appears to have been a small settlement with only two taxpayers, both paying the minimum. The Wembury manor tenants were listed with the Prior of Plympton's other tenants but, with no locative names, they cannot be identified.

During the Black Death, and its later visitations, the population may have crashed by anything up to 50 per cent. The totals for the 1377 poll tax, when all those aged 14 or over were required to pay four old pence, suggest that the most populous settlement was Langdon, with 31 taxed. Meanwhile, there were 27 at Down Thomas, 18 at what we now know as Traine, but only six at *Brighricheston*.²⁰ However, it is unclear what proportion of the population was under 14 and to what extent the tax was evaded. Moreover, the situation is also complicated by the likelihood that the Prior's tenants were included under Plympton. Consequently one can only guess at a total population for Langdon, Traine and *Brighricheston* of somewhere between 125 and 150. It is believed that nationally the figures remained at a low level until the 16th century.

¹⁴ Mills *et al.* 2000, 14–19.

¹⁵ Thorn & Thorn 1985, 17,91.

¹⁶ Thorn & Thorn 1985, 17,90.

¹⁷ Thorn & Thorn 1985, 17,89.

¹⁸ Evans 1910, 531–2.

¹⁹ Erskine 1969, 12–13.

²⁰ Fenwick (ed.) 1998, 123–4.

Extracts from the Plympton Priory Rental Book for 1481²¹ suggest there was a very different settlement pattern in the south-east quarter of the parish from that which prevailed subsequently. This indicates that the largest cluster was at South Wembury, evidently then a village with 33 holdings. There is a problem over the location of South Wembury, the largest settlement, which would seem to be one of the county's largest lost villages. But it was presumably located in the neighbourhood of Old Barton, where the layout of the fields to some extent suggests the former presence of strip cultivation indicative of communal agriculture. Wembury deer park, in front of Wembury house, is another possible location, and could account for the siting of the adjacent almshouses so far out of the modern village.

The Plympton rental book also records that there were 26 holdings at Knighton ('mostly cottages apparently'), 13 at West Wembury, including one referred to as a grange, and 7 at 'Browniswill & Wilrew'. While the last are now lost, from the transcript they appear to have been part of West Wembury and may be represented today by fields at Brownhill and Willowhayes.

Quite separate from all these localities, the mill was rented by John Perynne for 23s 4d,²² while the glebe of the church was rented out to six tenants. (Later documents, such as a 17th-century glebe terrier and the 19th-century tithe apportionment, make no reference to any glebe.)

²¹ A partial transcript made by J. Brooking Rowe in 1875 is held in Exeter's Westcountry Studies Library (s333.5/PLY/PLY).

²² Brooking Rowe 1875, 65, 64v, 66, 72, 70v, 74.

The 16th Century

To finance the war with France the Exchequer Lay Subsidies of 1524–25 imposed a tax on all males aged 16 years or over, the listing seemingly being the first to cover the whole of the parish. In 1525 this was paid by 57 males, which suggests a total population of somewhere around 180.²³ Highest taxed was James Notte, assessed on an income from land of £50 a year.

In 1545 an Inquisition Post Mortem was held at Exeter Castle into the lands of Henry Trecarell, whose landholding included the manor of 'Alphemeston otherwise Treawyn' and was inherited by his daughter, the widowed Joan Kelley.²⁴ Alphemeston was said to comprise one messuage, 20 acres of meadow, 300 of pasture, 300 of land (presumably arable), 40 of wood and 200 of heath, the tenant being Bartholomew Fortescue. Care must be taken with this document, however. The figures are obviously rounded and almost certainly exaggerated. Moreover, the location of extensive heathland is unclear - only some 15 acres on the tithe map had names including 'heathfield'. The modern soil map shows uniform coverage of brown-earth soils not conducive to heath, and topographic maps show an absence of straight hedge lines which might indicate recent heathland enclosure. The reference to a single messuage is also puzzling since three of the four farms mentioned in 1332 continued through to the present.

Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, in 1547 Thomas Wriothsesley, Earl of Southampton, was granted 'Wembury Farm with a close of

²³ Stoaite 1986, 167; Goose & Hinde 2006, 67–68 suggest a multiplier of 3.2.

²⁴ Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter, transcripts.

land called Southcrosse park, a cottage in Thorne and the works of customary tenants, woods and underwood on the demesne and four acres of woods in the northern part of Withicombe and six acres in the northern part of Reddewelles'.²⁵ From him it passed 'by gift and grant' to Robert Chamberlaine and in 1581 it was said to comprise '30 messuages 10 tofts 1 mill 5 dovecots 30 gardens 30 orchards 1000 acres of land (presumably arable) 100 acres of meadow 400 acres of pasture 100 acres of wood 100 acres of furze and heath 40 acres of moor and 100 acres of marsh'.²⁶ Again the figures are obviously both exaggerated and rounded up, since they would comprise half of the parish at that date. Yet the figure of 30 messuages is a considerable reduction on around 80 which prevailed in 1481, suggesting that many holdings had been merged, or possibly appropriated. In 1591 Robert Chamberlaine sold the manor to Sir John Hele, who built a new mansion close to the site of the farmhouse, spending an alleged £20,000 on what was said to have been the most magnificent in the county.²⁷ It is not clear whether South Wembury village was largely deserted by that date, or whether Sir John evicted the remaining tenantry.

Vincent Calmady had purchased Langdon in 1564, although the family's name does not appear in the taxation lists until the 17th century; they were to remain in occupation until 1876.²⁸ During this time they produced the Calmady Atlas, an extremely useful data source including a detailed map of the Langdon Estate, as discussed below.

The 17th Century

A survey of maritime resources in 1619 named 12 mariners and sailors in the parish.²⁹ Five years later a Lay Subsidy was imposed. The gentry taxed comprised Sir Warwick Hele and Edward Calmadye, gentleman, both taxed on their goods, while Martin Ryder and Edward Reed, both described as gentlemen, were taxed on their lands.³⁰

In 1625 Sir Warwick Hele founded almshouses for ten poor people, with an endowment of £30.³¹ The 1642 Protestation Return lists 109 adult males, suggesting an overall population that had increased to some 360. No Calmady nor Hele was included, but seven Riders were present.³²

The manor of Wembury passed by marriage to Sir Edward Hungerford, who had to sell it to pay the fines imposed on his father Anthony, and Sir John Hele, for being on the wrong side in the Civil War.³³ The purchaser was the Duke of Albemarle,³⁴ previously George Monck, born in North Devon. He had initially supported King Charles in the Civil War, but following his capture was eventually persuaded to change sides; later he was prominent in the recall of Charles II, who rewarded him appropriately: the 1662 Hearth Tax showed the Duke paying on 42 hearths, the highest figure in the county. In comparison, the highest figure in the parish was Josyas Calmady, taxed on 16 hearths at Langdon, while John Foster paid on eight hearths and Christopher

²⁵ Youngs 1955, 98.

²⁶ Evans 1910, 536.

²⁷ Evans 1910, 528–9.

²⁸ Gray 1995, 137.

²⁹ Gray 1990, 8.

³⁰ 1624 Lay Subsidy transcript by Charles Edward Banks, 309-310.

³¹ *Report of the Commissioners concerning Charities: County of Devon* Volume I, 1826, 219.

³² Howard 1973, 238.

³³ Mills *et al* 2000, 21.

³⁴ Evans 1910, 529.

Clubbery on seven. Clubbery was described as a gentleman and the family was associated with Traine.³⁵ Throughout the parish there were 33 taxpayers, slightly outnumbered by the 36 exempt on grounds of poverty. It is customary to assume a total population of around 300 from such figures.³⁶

In 1685 John Pollexfen, a member of parliament for the county, bought the Wembury estate from Christopher Monck but, while the Monck family thus left the scene, Monckswood, near Old Barton, still recalls their role in the parish's development.

Pollexfen made substantial alterations to Wembury House, which was illustrated by Edmund Prideaux in 1716.³⁷ It, and the fish pond on the Yealm, had been referred to by the Revd John Prince in 1710:

The gate-house leading into it, was fit to entertain a large and gentile family.... Omitting other curiosities, there might you have beheld a large and profitable pond, strongly walled and gated – which great, upon the flood, opened itself, and the tide stored it, in its season, with sea-fish of divers sorts, as bass, mullet, soal, salmon, plaise, and the like; And the ebb would of its own accord shut the gate upon them again.³⁸

The 18th Century

A series of so-called Freeholders Books, listing those qualified to serve on Devon juries, has survived from 1711 for more than half of the years up until 1816. Initially ownership of freehold or copyhold

land worth at least £10 a year was required for inclusion, and only three men in the parish were so qualified – John Pollexfen Esquire, Josias Calmady Esquire and Mr Francis Ryder. But in 1730 the criteria were somewhat relaxed, allowing tenants of land worth at least £20 a year held on long leases to be included. This enabled numbers to increase to 12 by 1733 with, very unusually, six of them being described as copyholders.³⁹

In 1744 the perpetual curate responded to a questionnaire from Bishop Claggett.⁴⁰ There were said to be 50 families (presumably a rounded figure), and he was unaware of any dissenters. There was also a charity school for the education of twelve poor children (although this seems to have been subsequently lost). The almshouse was described as well endowed.

In the 1750s the Dean Milles parochial collection referred (not entirely legibly) to Wembury House as 'the seat of ye Pollexfens afterwards of the Smiths & now belonging to Molesworth' which stood 'bleak & high'. It described the 'salt water pond [on the Yealm], which they can shut with flood gates, to confine sea water fish'. Also mentioned was 'Langdon the seat of the Calmadys'.

Benjamin Donn produced the first one-inch-to-the-mile map of Devon in 1765. This suggested that Knighton was the largest community and showed both Langdon House and Wembury House, but with no indication of their occupiers. 'Gift House' indicated the location of the almshouses, and a 'Wembury Mill' was noted north-west of the church, but this must have been Langdon Mill. Along the west-facing coast was 'Fresh Water',

³⁵ Stoaite 1982, 156; Mills *et al.* 2000, 31.

³⁶ Arkell 1982, 55.

³⁷ Cherry 1988, 110–112.

³⁸ Prince 1810 edition, 485–6.

³⁹ Dixon 2007.

⁴⁰ DRO Chanter 225B, 435–436.

presumably the stream that formed the boundary of the ancient parish at Bovisand. This stream may well have been highlighted because of its significance for the fleet; certainly, Bovisand was later the site of an Admiralty reservoir near Bovisand House. Also highlighted on the west-facing coast was a 'Withy Hedge', then in Plymstock parish. Between the stream and the hedge was a beacon, seemingly a little way inland.

A series of land tax assessments survives from 1780. In that year Warwick Calmady owned Langdon, John Spurrell owned part of Down Thomas, Humphrey Prideaux owned Traine and Mrs Molesworth owned Wembury Manor. The highest-rated property was the barton of South Wembury, followed by the barton of Langdon and then Traine.

Very much more detailed maps of the parish were produced in the 1780s. The first, surveyed between 1784 and 1786 was by the Board of Ordnance in connection with the defence of the naval dockyard, and made at six inches to the mile (1:10,560) with field boundaries accurately depicted.⁴¹ Towards the west of the parish the fields tended to be long and narrow, indicating enclosure from medieval open-field strips. Staddon Battery, built in 1780, is shown as a small defensive structure at the top of the cliff, and the only one present on Staddon Heights at that date. This seems to have been the first map to show Down Thomas and it correctly named Langdon Mill.

Later that decade the 'Calmady Atlas' was produced, mapping lands held by that family in the south-west.⁴² Sheet No. 4 was titled 'Langdon and Down Thomas'

⁴¹ Board of Ordnance 6-inch drawing No. 19, Parts V & VI.c.

⁴² DRO 6107.

and surveyed at a scale of six chains to the inch (1:4752), naming the fields and differentiating between pasture and arable, with the latter predominating. The manor of Down Thomas had been divided between three owners since 1428, and the Calmady family had acquired one of the parts, the holdings being considerably intermingled.

The 19th Century

The first national census of 1801 recorded a population of 390. This was to increase substantially to 652 by 1831, the 19th-century maximum.

Wembury manor had passed by marriage to Earl Camden and by 1797 Wembury House, Sir John Hele's mansion, was in ruins. In 1802 the 890 acres of the manor, with a rental of nearly £900, were offered for sale by auction. The property included a 'valuable fishery' and was described as 'very eligible for building on'.⁴³ The purchaser was Thomas Lockyer, a Plymouth merchant, for £26,500 plus £1,500 for the timber⁴⁴; it was Lockyer who began building the present Wembury House.⁴⁵ Polwhele, writing in 1806, recorded the disposal and removal of materials from the old house, including the Portland stone facing, while 'a few years ago the outside woodwork of the sash frames still had the gilding remaining upon them'.⁴⁶ Thomas Lockyer died in that year and this led to the manor being again offered for sale, by then increased to 946 acres. It was described as including 'a new-built mansion house, with lawn in front, a coach-house and suitable stabling ... a bowling green, and a most elegant vinery and plant-house.... Also, the

⁴³ *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* 10.6.1802 3b.

⁴⁴ Polwhele 1806, 454.

⁴⁵ Evans 1910, 529–530.

⁴⁶ Polwhele 1806, 454.

Ferriage or Passage over the Haven and River of Yealme, called Shepeing Ferry, with the Tolls and Dues of the said River, and the Water, Piscary, Fishing, Oysterage, and Royalty of, in, and through the same'.⁴⁷

In 1814 the manor was again offered for sale, but reduced to 550 acres; within the house 'all the doors of the sitting and best bedrooms, 24 in number, are made of a very beautiful Spanish mahogany' while to the rear was 'a mount or terrace, about 300 feet in length, 30 feet wide and 30 feet high, commanding extensive views of the ocean'.⁴⁸ While the Calmady's bought substantial parts of the lands, extending the Langdon Estate into the eastern part of the parish, the manor house itself was not sold until 1822,⁴⁹ it is said to the diplomat Sir Edward Thornton. Thomas Lockyer's son, another Thomas, moved into what became the new manor house, South Wembury House, overlooking the Yealm.⁵⁰ This was shown as 'Lockyer's Cottage' on the tithe map, when it was depicted as a small structure, but was to be considerably extended by the 1860s, when the area was surveyed by the Ordnance Survey. The building was by then the very imposing 'South Wembury House' with garden buildings to north and south. It is now Thorn House.

The last of the surviving Freemans Books dates from 1816. By that year the number of jurors had fallen to three, comprising Thomas Lockyer Esquire at South Wembury, Philip Light Anthony Esquire at Traine Barton and Nathaniel Willing at Ford.⁵¹ Land values are believed to have more than trebled nationally since 1733,

⁴⁷ *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* 14.7.1808, 1b.

⁴⁸ *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* 26.5.1814 4d.

⁴⁹ Mills *et al.*, 2000, 21.

⁵⁰ Evans 1910, 530.

⁵¹ DRO QS7/64.

which should have increased the number of jurors, and it seems that the reduction was due to the landowners replacing long leases with much shorter terms.⁵²

Another building overlooking the Yealm was the coastguard station, which must have been present from soon after the service was formed in 1822, since James Cragg, one of the boatmen, was involved in an heroic rescue following the wreck of the 'John' of Bideford in 1824.⁵³

The last-surviving land tax assessment dates from 1830. By then Charles Biggs Calmady owned the tithes, Langdon, and part of Down Thomas, the rest of that manor being divided between E.P. Bastard and William Prance. Thomas Lockyer owned South Wembury and the Old and New Bartons. Sir Edward Thornton owned Wembury House, with P.L. Anthony owning Traine and a Mr Hensleigh owning Spurwell.

The tithe map of around 1839 showed just one surviving open field, within the Down Thomas manor. Called 'Common Lenthney', it was divided into three strips. This was to lead to the enclosure commissioners re-casting the scattered lands of the three owners into more compact blocks in 1862.⁵⁴

The 1851 census confirms the presence of high-status residences in the parish. Charles Calmady at Langdon Hall farmed 850 acres, while Sir Edward Thornton still occupied Wembury House and Thomas Lockyer occupied South Wembury House. There was little attempt being made to exploit the marine environment, with just two mariners and one fisherman present in the parish; so it is probable that the

⁵² Turner *et al.* 1997, 314–6.

⁵³ Wembury Parish Council 2000, 21.

⁵⁴ Mills *et al.* 2000, 10–13.

Lieutenant in the Coastguard and his five men were there to prevent another form of marine activity - smuggling. There were two copper miners at Knighton, perhaps working at the Wheal Emily Mine, although following the 1863 Ordnance Survey the resulting map indicated it to be '(Antimony)'.

A religious census was also taken on 30 March 1851.⁵⁵ On that day at the ancient parish the minister estimated there were 105 at the morning service and 80 at the afternoon service, with 34 attending the morning Sunday school. A note from the minister explained that, because of its isolation, the attendance was much larger during the summer than in the winter. There was a Wesleyan chapel at Down Thomas, said to have been erected in 1832, with an attendance of 30 during the morning and 39 during the afternoon service, while there was a Bible Christian 'preaching house' at 'Neighton' attended by 10 in the afternoon and 36 in the evening. The location of this is unclear, but another Methodist chapel was built in 1871 south of the village and close to Old Barton Farm; this closed around 1913⁵⁶ and the building is now residential.

By the middle of the 19th century technological improvements to the French fleet put that country in a position to challenge the supremacy of the Royal Navy. This led to a considerable investment in defensive structures around the principal dockyards such as Devonport, the area involved extending as far as Wembury. The Staddon Heights Defences were intended to deny access to a position overlooking Plymouth by an enemy that had succeeded in landing in Wembury Bay. Although Staddon Fort lies

just outside the extended parish boundary, the associated structures are now within the parish. Most prominent among them is Fort Bovisand, recommended in 1858 and completed in 1869 with an armament of nine- and ten-inch guns. During the last war it housed quick-firing guns and searchlights. Following the disbanding of coast artillery in 1956 the site became a commercial diving school.⁵⁷ Fort Bovisand was linked to Staddon Fort by a military road via Watch House Battery (also completed in 1869), Frobisher Battery (completed in 1892) and Brownhill Battery (believed to have been completed in 1867).⁵⁸ All these positions were protected by a deep, dry ditch on the landward side. The massive masonry wall of the target butts also dates from the 1860s, being lengthened later that century.⁵⁹

In the 1881 census Richard Cory JP occupied Langdon and Ralph Dawson JP occupied Wembury House, and by then the 500 acres of Wembury Barton were being separately occupied. There were several shipwrights living at Down Thomas, but it is not clear whether they were working in the parish or at Kelly's shipyard at Mount Batten. Out of a total population of approximately 560, the very large majority still lived in families completely dependent on agriculture.

The 20th Century

Further defences were added early in the 20th century. Lentney Battery, completed in 1905 to the north-east of Westlake Bay, possessed two six-inch guns and became a practice battery during the last war.⁶⁰ The site provides the best surviving example

⁵⁵ Wickes 1990, 72.

⁵⁶ Wembury Parish Council 2000, 15; Clamp 1995, 15.

⁵⁷ Pye & Woodward 1996, 210–214.

⁵⁸ Pye & Woodward 1996, 206, 205, 204.

⁵⁹ Pye & Woodward 1996, 218.

⁶⁰ Pye & Woodward 1996, 223–4.

of a coastal defence battery in the Plymouth area. Renney Battery, some 400m to the south, dated from 1905–6 but was more heavily armed, with three 9.2-inch guns, and covered the eastern approach to the dockyard.⁶¹ This site has since been re-developed.

Early in the twentieth century the physical attributes of Wembury Bay led to proposals for major port development capable of handling the largest ships of the day.⁶² This proposal was driven largely by the Plymouth Council, plus individuals and business interests in the city wishing to compete with Southampton, London and Liverpool. Their plan involved the construction of a tidal harbour, with water depths of 42 to 48 feet at low water, protected by three breakwaters. Two of these were to extend a mile out to sea in the manner of a giant pair of callipers, sheltering a 235-acre harbour surrounded on three sides by equally extensive reclaimed land. One leg of these 'callipers' was to extend from Wembury Point to the Mewstone and then continue south-eastwards for three-quarters of a mile. The second would head south from the vicinity of the church, before turning south-west and creating a harbour entrance a quarter of a mile wide between it and the other 'leg'. The third breakwater was to be built west-south-westwards from the eastern bank of the mouth of the Yealm to create an additional sheltered anchorage. Hinterland connections were to depend largely on a new rail line; this would follow the valley from Wembury beach through Mill Meadow to just north of Langdon Court, where it would tunnel through to Staddiscombe and link with the network at Pomphlett.

⁶¹ Pye & Woodward 1996, 225–6.

⁶² Broughton, 2001.

Permission for the project required an Act of Parliament, the initial step in the process being scrutiny by a committee of the House of Lords. Opposition to the scheme was led by the Great Western Railway - which feared the impact on its Millbay Docks in Plymouth – supported by a range of other objectors. The outcome was a decision that the proposal should not proceed, and in this way the Wembury environment was saved from what would have been a completely urbanised and industrialised future. No records exist of the reasons for this decision, but the criticism voiced most widely in the hearings was that the scheme's economics were fundamentally unsound.

Literary fame came in 1928 with the publication of John Galsworthy's *Swan Song*, sequel to *The Forsyte Saga*. In Chapter XI, Part III, Soames Forsyte pursues family history, finding in his ancestral parish a field called 'Great Forsyte'. The nameless village, supposedly in Dorset, is in fact Wembury, where Galsworthy's ancestors lived. Here, in Langdon, we find on the tithe map 'Great Galsworthy', a large field in the area now known as Wembury Point.

In August 1927 the Langdon Court Estate was auctioned, its 2080 acres (two-thirds of the parish) divided into 72 lots, of which only 16 remained unsold on the day.⁶³ The map in the sale catalogue shows considerable differences from the 'Calmady Atlas'. While the intermingling to the west had been rationalised by the enclosure commissioners, there had been extensive gains to the east, including West Wembury, part of Knighton village and extending to Wembury Wood on Cofflete Creek. Among the lots unsold on the day

⁶³ DRO 547B/P2674.

was Langdon Court itself with its 61 acres of grounds. It was described as dating chiefly from the Tudor period with the grounds including terraced flower gardens, lily ponds and shrubberies as well as two tennis lawns, a croquet lawn and a large vinery.

The bulk of the coastal strip was divided into two sale lots, with their boundary just to the east of the boathouse. Lot 49, to the west, having been described as 'An important area of sea front land, ripe for development and containing within its boundary numerous Imposing Building Sites' was sold but was to remain undeveloped. Lot 44 was initially unsold, despite the blandishment that it was 'An Unique and very valuable Seaside Building Estate comprising the Delightful Little Resort known as Wembury Bay ... possessing infinite possibilities of profitable development'. The only building on this site was the mill, then described as 'an Old-fashioned cottage' comprising 'three Bedrooms, Sitting Room, Kitchen, Old Mill House with loft over, and old Dairy House'. It is said to have ceased working around 1900.⁶⁴ The Mewstone, Lot 50, was described as 'so placed that it lends itself admirably as a Summer Retreat'. It was bought by Mr R.A. Stansell for £500, with the intention using the island as a resort and converting the old hut into a tea-house. In the event, the island was put back on the market and bought in 1934 by a Miss Goldman as a wedding present for her brother, who intended to use it for bulb growing.⁶⁵

R.A. Stansell had also bought the land around Heybrook Bay, where he began residential development and sited two

small holiday camps on the adjacent Wembury Point. The potential for housing to spread along the coast caused concern among the emergent preservationist community by 1932. R. A. Stansell had plans to build over the whole of Wembury Point, and so-called 'bungalows', some of them merely old bus bodies had been sited around a hundred yards from the church.⁶⁶ In 1932 a survey of the Devon coast was commissioned from the planner W. Harding Thompson by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England,⁶⁷ but some of his comments on Wembury may not have been to the taste of local preservationists:

With the exception of old Wembury Church and the military buildings at Staddon Point, there was formerly no building on the cliffs between the Yealm and Mount Batten. A small seaside resort is now being developed at Heybrook Bay and Wembury Point, where some consideration has been given to the lay-out and the preservation of amenities. Work is in progress on new roads, to which access is gained through the old village community at Down Thomas. A much less desirable form of development is now in hand at West Wembury. Here there appears to be no effective method of control over the character of the new buildings. This estate has been broken up and sold, and already, on the cliff lands, may be seen converted motor-buses, railway coaches and wooden huts as living quarters, but with no provision for adequate water supply or drainage. West Wembury Estate, if skilfully planned and properly developed, could be made into an harmonious extension of the old village, suitable as a quiet resort for those who normally work in Plymouth; but it would indeed be a disaster if it

⁶⁴ Clamp 1995, 1.

⁶⁵ *Western Morning News* 10.4.1934 & 11.7.1934, in Westcountry Studies Library Wembury parish file, A11.

⁶⁶ Clamp 1995, 16.

⁶⁷ Harding Thompson 1932, 9.

developed on similar lines to Whitsand Bay in Cornwall, because the coast from the Yealm to Heybrook Bay has, up to the present time, retained its quiet charm and rural character.⁶⁸

Perhaps in response to the idea that “skilfully planned” ‘bungaloid’ development was acceptable, in 1934 a public appeal by the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society funded the purchase of a strip of foreshore to establish one of the first bird sanctuaries in the county.⁶⁹ The following year a Wembury Preservation Society was formed and, with some difficulty and local opposition,⁷⁰ was able to purchase 27 threatened acres around the church. These were given to the National Trust in 1939. This extended the Trust’s holding in Wembury, which had commenced a year earlier when the owner of the South Wembury Estate, Mrs Ida Sebag-Montefiore, donated 50 acres of cliff land which she feared would be developed once she had sold the estate.⁷¹ (The estate’s attractions included ‘The Manor or Lordship or reputed Manor or Lordship of Wembury, otherwise South Wembury’; and gardens said to contain one of the finest collections of shrubs in the country.⁷² The remainder of the sale comprised Old Barton Farm and the four coastguard cottages on the River Yealm.)

The Fall of France in 1940 made the Wembury coast effectively part of the front line. In an attempt to mitigate the effects of the Blitz on Plymouth, bombing decoys were sited west of Down Thomas

and east of Wembury village⁷³ and, as this Heritage Appraisal’s database reveals, numerous other defence-related developments mushroomed in the western part of the parish. These included four-inch guns sited close to Wembury Point. In the post-war years these provided the basis for the navy’s gunnery school⁷⁴, which was subsequently considerably extended with the requisition of land and the construction of buildings. In 1956 the site became the navy’s permanent naval gunnery school and firing range and was named HMS Cambridge. This had six gun turrets close to the cliff backed by ancillary buildings. Behind was a nine-hole golf course and above that were the administration and accommodation buildings, extending 600m inland. During periods of firing walkers along the cliff path took an alternative route behind the guns. In 1985 the role of HMS Cambridge changed to include internal security, and the Leach Building was constructed as a ‘semi-hardened command centre’, its design appropriate to the Cold War era.⁷⁵ The end of the Cold War led to a re-assessment of military requirements, with the bulk of the site being declared redundant and the firing range ceasing activity in 2001. This led to purchase by the National Trust in 2006 after a successful fund-raising appeal.

Despite the development threats in the pre-war years, it was well into the 20th century before new housing had a major impact in the Wembury population and landscape. The population of the parish remained remarkably constant, between 500 and 600, in all the censuses from 1851 to 1951. Even when the area of the parish

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 19.

⁶⁹ Western Morning News, 3.5.35

⁷⁰ Western Morning News, 10.5.38

⁷¹ Westcountry Studies Library Wembury parish file, A15, A22, A25.

⁷² DRO 547B/P3731(i), 16, 11.

⁷³ Devon County Council Historic Environment Record: Primary Record Numbers 59228, 13885.

⁷⁴ Berry 2006a, 4.

⁷⁵ Berry 2006a, 5.

was increased in 1966 by a boundary extension northward to take in part of Plymstock parish, this had little effect on the population figures as the boundary was drawn to exclude the settlement of Staddiscombe. Consequently the main change in this respect occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s when substantial housing developments at Wembury and Heybrook Bay rapidly took the total to nearly 3000. In Wembury the vast majority of this expansion took place on what had been, in Langdon Estate times, West Wembury Farm.

In 1960 the parish was included in the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the coast is also designated Heritage Coast, and further protection is given to Sites of Special Scientific Interest, including at Wembury Point.

Protection for a significant number of buildings and other structures is provided under the standard Listing system administered by English Heritage. In the

parish there is currently one building listed at Grade I, plus 8 buildings or features at Grade II* and 21 at Grade II. Although the official list identifies a surviving portion of medieval rood screen in the church, and accords it Grade I, it should be noted that this artefact is not known to the current church authorities.

All listed buildings and other features are detailed in Table 1 overleaf. So far as is possible, this has been organised geographically to draw out the manner in which these structures cluster in different parts of the parish.

Further details of all listed structures can be found in the Heritage Appraisal Database. The first column in this database gives 'WM' record numbers which correspond with those listed in the table. The database also covers a very large number of additional buildings and features of note.

Table 1 Listed buildings and structures

WM reference no.	Category	Building or structure	Grade
120	Ecclesiastical	St Werburgh's Church	I
121	"	Surviving portion of Medieval rood screen	I
119	"	Chapel at Hele Almshouses	II*
125	Residential	Hele Almshouses	II*
118	"	Wembury House	II*
155	"	Two pairs of gate piers and linking walls, 230m NNE of Wembury House	II
158	"	Walled Terrace, Wembury House	II*
154	"	Kitchen garden, walls and gate piers, Wembury House	II
144	"	Garden boundary walls and gate piers, NW and SE of Wembury House	II
160	Residential/ Agricultural	West Wembury House	II
208	Agricultural industry	Blacksmith's workshop, West Wembury	II
169	Residential	Cottage, 27 Knighton Hill	II
162	"	Warren Point coastguard cottages	II
161	Misc.	Boathouse NE of Warren Point coastguard cottages	II
133	Residential	Langdon Court	II*
179	"	Garden wall, steps and piers, immediately south of Langdon Court	II*
142	"	Two garden houses or gazebos, Langdon Court	II*
143	"	Two pairs of gate piers, Langdon Court	II*
159	"	Garden at Langdon Court	II
163	"	Langdon Lodge	II
164	Agricultural	Langdon Tithe barn	II
168	Residential/ Agricultural	Langdon Barton farmhouse	II
165	Agricultural	Cart shed at Langdon Barton farmhouse	II
166	"	Shippon with hay loft above, 50m NNW of Langdon Barton farmhouse	II
167	"	Shippon 20m north of Langdon Barton farmhouse	II
170	Residential/ Agricultural	Prince's Farmhouse	II
046	Residential	Bovisand Lodge	II
047	"	Bovisand coastguard cottages	II
091	Defence	Bovisand pier	II
004	"	Renney Battery	II
005	"	Lentney Battery	II
082	"	Staddon Point Battery	

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